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HHSD/18/100765

Dear Householder

I am pleased to advise that the Lance Creek Water Connection project being delivered by South Gippsland Water will supply fluoridated drinking water to the communities of Korumburra, Poowong, Loch and Nyora. Good oral health is essential to overall health and these communities will soon receive the benefits of water fluoridation which helps to reduce tooth decay.

To assist you with any questions about the supply of fluoridated drinking water, please refer to the enclosed information which includes a message from the Chief Health Officer of Victoria.

For further information about water fluoridation:

- call the water fluoridation information line on 1800 651 723
- visit the water fluoridation website <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/water-fluoridation>
- talk to your dental professional, GP, pharmacist or maternal and child health nurse.

Information on the project is available from South Gippsland Water's customer service on 1300 851 636 or on www.sgwater.com.au/project_page/projects/lance-creek-water-connection/.

Yours sincerely

Dr Angie Bone

Deputy Chief Health Officer (Environment)

Health Protection Branch

Regulation Health Protection and Emergency Management

10/08/2018

Water fluoridation

Community information

A message from Victoria's Chief Health Officer

The Victorian government is committed to improving the oral health of all Victorians. This involves providing water fluoridation to those Victorian communities that do not currently have access to this important and effective public health measure.

Preventing problems before they occur is vital to good public health.

Water fluoridation is safe and effective and is recommended by leading national and international health organisations. More than 90 per cent of Victorians already drink water with either naturally occurring or added fluoride. Melbourne and some regional areas have enjoyed the benefits of fluoridated drinking water for more than 40 years.

Even with a fluoridated drinking water supply, it is important to look after your teeth through healthy eating, regular brushing, appropriate use of fluoride toothpaste and regular dental check-ups.

I encourage you to read the following information.



Professor Charles Guest

Chief Health Officer

What is water fluoridation?

Water fluoridation is the process of adjusting the amount of fluoride in drinking water to an optimal level to help reduce tooth decay. It is recommended by leading national and international health organisations and its extension to new areas is a key strategy in Australia's National Oral Health Plan.

In some parts of Victoria, the local water supply naturally contains fluoride at a beneficial level, however most water supplies naturally contain low levels that are insufficient for improving dental health.

Adding fluoride does not alter the taste or smell of water.

What is fluoride?

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral found in rock, air, soil, plants and water. All fresh and sea water contains some fluoride. Many foods and drinks naturally contain fluoride. It is also added to:

- drinking water, where fluoride is added to the local water supply
- fluoride toothpastes, gels and mouth rinses
- fluoride products painted on the teeth by a dental professional.

What are the benefits of water fluoridation?

Fluoride in water supplies is helpful because it:

- helps protect against tooth decay in people of all ages, from the very young to the elderly
- repairs weak spots that could become cavities (holes in teeth) on the surface of the tooth
- reduces the amount of money people need to spend on dental treatment
- saves the community money and time (away from work and school)
- reduces discomfort and pain caused by tooth decay
- provides a benefit to all people, regardless of individual age, education, income, motivation or access to dental and health care.

How much fluoride is added to drinking water?

To help protect teeth against tooth decay, only a very small amount of fluoride is needed in drinking water. Australia's peak health body, the National Health and Medical Research Council, supports adjusting fluoride levels in Australia's drinking water supplies to between 0.6 to 1.1 mg/L. This range considers fluoride intake from other sources such as foods, drinks and dental products and provides an effective way to reduce tooth decay, while minimising any risk of dental fluorosis.

For Victoria, the natural fluoride content of drinking water is adjusted to an optimal level of 1 mg/L (also known as 1 part per million). This is the level that achieves maximum reduction in tooth decay with no aesthetically significant dental fluorosis. As a comparison, the amount of fluoride in children's toothpaste is 400–500 parts per million and in regular toothpaste is 1,000 parts per million.

How does fluoride protect against tooth decay?

Tooth decay occurs when acid destroys the outer surface of the tooth. The acid is produced by bacteria in the mouth from food and drinks containing sugar.

Fluoride works by helping to strengthen the mineral structure of developing teeth. Fluoride can limit the amount of acid produced and acts like a constant repair kit by repairing the early stages of tooth decay.

How does oral health affect a person's general health?

It is important to look after teeth throughout life as good dental health has a direct impact on overall health. Severe tooth decay can affect appearance, self-esteem, social interaction and the ability to eat and chew, which in turn can affect general health.

The consequences of dental decay are costly in terms of time, money and personal pain and suffering.

Once a tooth is filled, it becomes structurally weaker and may require further treatment. In children, if baby teeth are lost too early because of decay their adult teeth may not develop in the correct position, creating dental complications later in life.

Is tooth decay a serious issue?

Tooth decay is still a significant problem in Victoria. Across Victoria in 2013-14 there were more than 4,000 children under the age of 10, including 193 two-year-olds and 694 four-year-olds, who required a general anaesthetic to treat their dental decay. In the same year, in areas of Victoria without water fluoridation, children under the age of 10 were two times more likely to require a general anaesthetic in hospital to treat dental decay compared to children in areas with water fluoridation.

How is fluoride added to drinking water?

Fluoride is added to the water at drinking water treatment plants that have been designed to add carefully controlled amounts. The fluoride level in the water is continuously monitored and equipment is designed to shut down if fluoride exceeds predetermined levels at any point in the water treatment system. Samples of water are also taken from sites throughout the water supply network to check the fluoride concentration 'at the tap'.

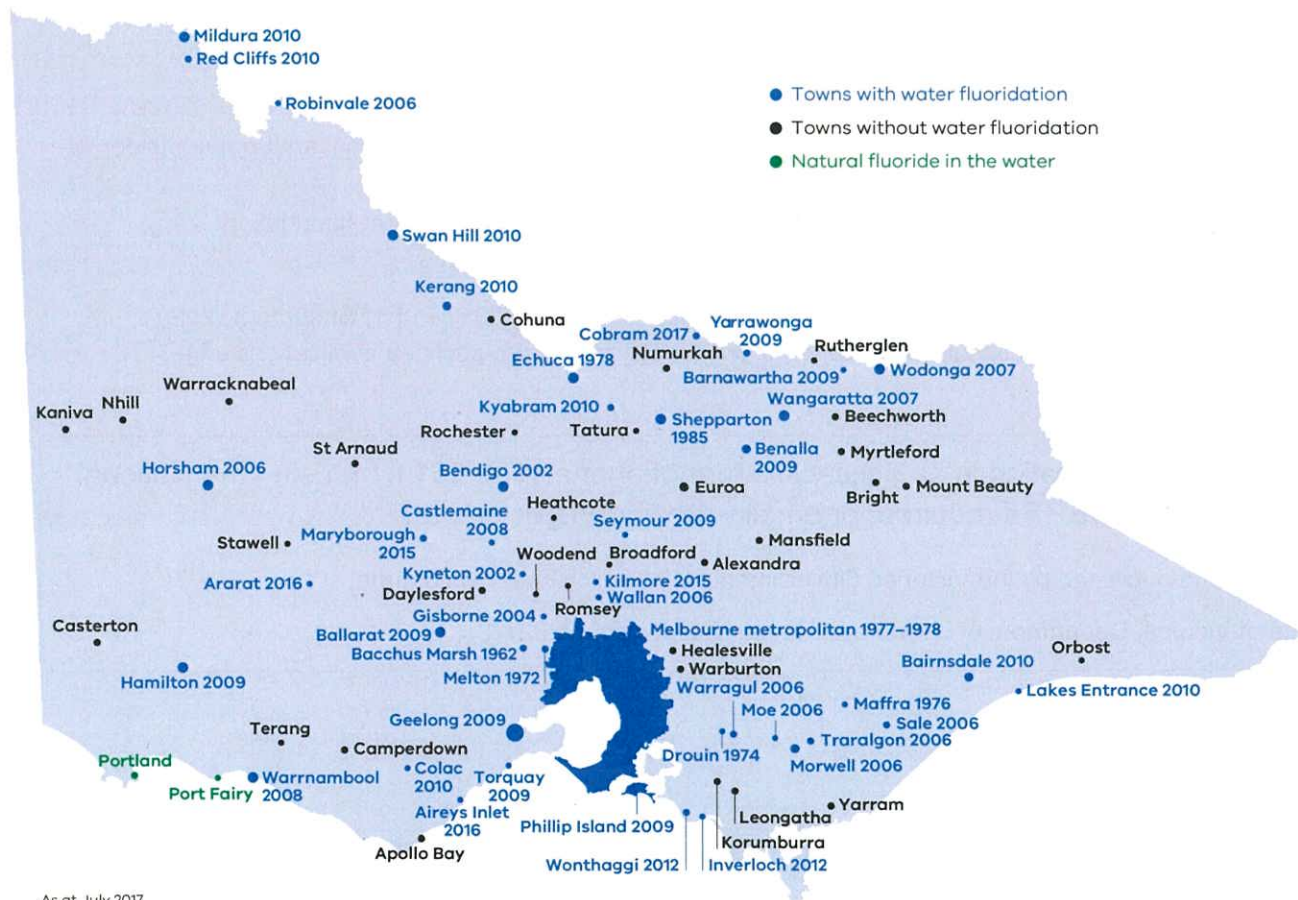
How do I know water fluoridation is safe?

Any chemical added to drinking water must be proven to be safe when ingested at the recommended maximum concentration in drinking water.

The National Health and Medical Research Council has specified the compounds that are acceptable to add to drinking water for this purpose. These are: sodium fluoride, sodium fluorosilicate and fluorosilicic acid. The local water agency selects the type of compound based on the type of fluoridation infrastructure at the water treatment plant.

Which Victorian communities have fluoridated water?

Currently 90 per cent of Victorians drink fluoridated water. Melbourne and some regional centres have had fluoridated water for 40 years.



As at July 2017

Additional health advice

Infant formula

Breastfeeding remains the preferred method of infant feeding and provides perfect nutrition to match an infant's needs. Although breast milk is the best feeding choice for babies, infant formula is readily available and nutritionally adequate. If infant formula is used, it is safe in Australia to reconstitute it using fluoridated water.

Toothpaste recommendations

- **Children aged up to 18 months:** clean teeth twice a day without any toothpaste. (A health professional may recommend the use of a small amount of low-fluoride toothpaste for this age group).
- **Children aged between 18 months and five years (inclusive):** clean teeth twice daily using a pea-sized amount of low-fluoride toothpaste. (A health professional may recommend the use of standard fluoride toothpaste for this age group).
- **Children aged six years and older, teenagers and adults:** clean teeth twice daily using standard fluoride toothpaste.

Fluoride tablets, drops and lozenges are no longer recommended

Regardless of whether your water is fluoridated, fluoride tablets, drops and lozenges are no longer recommended in Australia and are no longer available. If members of your household have been using these it is important to discontinue their use. Dental professionals may still use and recommend fluoride varnishes and mouth rinses.

Further information

If you need more information about water fluoridation:

- call the water fluoridation information line on 1800 651 723
- visit the Better Health Channel at <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/dental-care-fluoride>
- visit the Health website at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/water-fluoridation>
- talk to your dental professional, GP, pharmacist or maternal child health nurse.
- more information from National Health and Medical Research Council, 2017 Public Statement Water Fluoridation and Human Health in Australia <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e44-0>

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 761 874, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email water@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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